

Creeper chugs slowly but surely

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PROVO CANYON — The Heber Creeper is chugging along slowly, and somewhat surely up this rock-lined canyon.

The steam-powered railroaod, one of a handful in the United States, has been running for only the past few weeks.

For years the railway was one of the most popular tourist attractions in Utah.

Travelers could board the train in Wasatch County and browse through a railroad village or get on the train at Bridal Veil Falls in Provo Canyon.

But at the beginning of this year's train season a lawsuit and flood-ruined tracks halted the train. The entire train operation went into receivership

until those problems could be worked out.

Sid Gilbert, a certified public accountant, was appointed as receiver of the railroad. He leased the operation to Murl Rawlins and his company, Deer Creek Scenic Railroad.

Rawlins said the train is making three runs a day, but most people think the train has stopped altogether.

"On our first run we had eight people, and compared to the hundreds last year that wasn't very good," said Rawlins. "Things are gradually picking up."

Rawlins said new track has been laid to Milepost 9. The train will probably run to Bridal Veil Falls by the end of the year.

"We are just working piece by piece and trying to put things back together," he said. "There is so much to do sometimes I think I am crazy."

Rawlins said he decided to take over the operation of the train because if it was shut down for one year it might mean the end of the train.

"Just sitting idle for one year could kill this operation," he said. "This is a great tourist attraction, and it would be a shame to lose it."

Rawlins has a two-year lease on the operation. He plans on doing much general maintenance.

The top priority is to get the track fixed and the train operating the entire length of the canyon.

After that, the sky is the limit.

"We have ideas floating around here like crazy," he said. "Next year should be a big year."

The train will soon be open for private parties again, with food served.

"We are sinking lots of money into this operation, and all I expect to get back at this point is my initial investment," he said.